

Westmont College The Horizon

Voice

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‘Black’ history month is invitation to celebrate our collective history

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Lest anyone accuse me of being oversensitive or an angry minority, my family is comprised of Whites, Blacks, Latino/as, and of course Chinese. And I grew up essentially White (culturally) in a Jewish Caucasian community on the East coast. Yet I must comment on Garrett Fahy’s letter last week about Black History Month.

Although there are several points in his letter that I take issue with, I will limit my comments to two of his assertions. One being that essentially Black History Month “does not mean much” and the other that the civil rights amendment “provided equal footing” for African Americans.

First of all, Black History Month does not matter much to him, i.e. the majority White population or to those who have assimilated into the majority because he and those in the majority (whether ethnically or culturally) do not view Black History as their history.

As Americans, Black History is our history. As an American born of immigrant parents and raised in Massachusetts, Black History matters to me because I am an American. Don’t you see?

As an American, the stories and lives of African-Americans should matter and is indeed my history too. So why do we need a special time set aside to emphasize Black History? What is difficult for the majority is to realize and remember is that their history, their stories, their faces are highlighted everyday in our society through our media and education.

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Douglas Sharp, a professor of systematic theology at Northern Baptist Theological seminary and author of “No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity” wrote:

“Practically every institutional system operating in the United States today was created or adapted, developed and enlarged, for the benefit and advantage of European Americans. These institutional systems externalized European American selves, expressing their purposes, aspirations, interests, norms, memories, meanings, and worldview. The systems of American government, politics, economics, property, education, transportation, healthcare, labor and a host of others—including religion—were created and adapted by European Americans for European Americans.”

Regarding equal footing for African-Americans...though the law has established such ‘equal footing,’ how often have such laws been ignored? How many times have treaties with the Native peoples were broken again and again?

It may provide a means for a lawsuit when there is a clear (very clear) racist incident but laws do not change attitudes, hearts or systems. I do not have to hear a racial slur to be reminded that I am ‘the other,’ that I do not belong, and that my family history and values are not considered ‘American.’

It is simply a ‘look’ (some of you know what I mean), or a question, “Where are you from?” “Boston” “No, where are you really from?” (Not again...)

And what do I say to my thirteen-year-old African-American/Puerto Rican nephew when he is told by his worried mom that he cannot grow an afro because he will look “too black” and will soon be followed by storekeepers and be stopped by police simply because he is a young Black man?

What do I say to my mom who was raised in British Hong Kong who was fired from her job because she speaks English with an “Asian-ish” accent? How should I feel when I am asked “Do you work at the

Chinese restaurant” when picking up my drycleaning?

What is most painful for myself and so many who have heard insensitive remarks or get that ‘look’ is that we expect more empathy and compassion from our Christian brothers and sisters on this campus and in the church. When I was an engineer, I felt more freedom to confront a

co-worker about his racist attitudes and remarks than I do here.

I am either “oversensitive” or “angry” or worse I am not being “Christian.” This has caused more pain and questioning of faith in God and trust in other believers than my time among atheists in my engineering days or my teaching in China.

This should not be. No, we are not on equal footing. And, yes, Black History Month means much to me and it should mean much to all of us. 